Vitali Latov

THE SOVIET ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Vitali Latov

THE SOVIET ELECTORAL SYSTEM

NOVOSTI PRESS AGENCY PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW, 1974

Contents

The State Is Ourselves	*3*
Principles of Organisation	*13*
The Electoral System in the USSR	*19*
The Electoral Districts	*31*
The Election Committees	*36*
The Polling Station	*40*
The Importance of the Electoral Register	*46*
Candidates Are Nominated by the People	*48*
Meeting the Constituents	*53*
The Poll	*57*
The Count	*60*
Protected by the Law	*65*
The Power of the Soviets Is the Power of the People	*70*

В. Латов
СОВЕТСКАЯ ИЗБИРАТЕЛЬНАЯ СИСТЕМА
на английском языке
Цена 24 коп.

© Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1974

The State Is Ourselves

Soviet guide-books for tourists mention the sights to be seen in the many ancient Russian towns such as Uglich, Suzdal, Vladimir, Rostov, Yaroslavl, famous for their masterpieces of national architecture and their unique frescoes. These are monuments of Russia's history, her culture and art. Not far from these "centres of tourist attraction"—200 kilometres north-east of Moscow, there is the town of Ivanovo. Although it is just a hundred years old, and therefore young compared with its neighbours celebrated for their antiquity, it can vie in fame with towns a thousand years old, so well is it known in the USSR. For Ivanovo is the birthplace of Russia's first Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the prototype of Soviet power, a form of government unprecedented in world history.

On the bank of the small river Talka, on the outskirts of Ivanovo, a granite obelisk stands in memory of the events that took place there in 1905 when the whole of Russia was swept

by the flames of the first Russian revolution. The monument marks the spot where Ivanovo-Voznesensk textile workers, then on strike, held their revolutionary protest meetings. This is how it was.

On May 12, 1905, all factories in Ivanovo-Voznesensk stopped. The Ivanovo textile workers declared a political strike. The number of strikers exceeded 70,000. At the meetings, held on the bank of the Talka, they resolved to set up a revolutionary organ of power of their own. The Bolsheviks who led the strike aimed at giving the workers' movement purpose and organisation. In this way a Soviet of Deputies was created. It presented the factory-owners with 26 demands. The chief of them were: an 8-hour working day, no fines, no factory police, no factory prisons, freedom of speech, association and the press, a fixed minimum wage, pensions for disabled workers, and creches for the young children of working mothers. The Soviet took charge of the food supply, the finances, and directed the strike itself.

151 deputies were elected to the Soviet. Most of them were young people, 21-25 years old. They held some of the most responsible positions—on the strike committee and on the finance committee, which collected money and distributed it among the poorest families. The workers of Polushin's factory nominated 17-year-old Matryona Golubeva, a Bolshevik Party member, at whose lodgings arms and illegal literature were stored. The workers of the "Kompania" factory nominated 18-year-old weaver Maria Nogovitsina.

On May 20, the Soviet resolved to set up an

armed detachment—workers' militia—and on May 22, in defiance of the Governor's orders, this workers' militia began to keep the town in order, driving the police out of the workers' districts.

Lenin praised the textile workers' action, which, he wrote, revealed a "high degree of political maturity in the workers."

Thus, long before the October revolution the Soviets were born—in the form of committee. Lenin recognised the Soviets as a new form of state power, the only possible revolutionary form of government, directly expressing the interests of the majority of workers and farmers, a form of political organisation of society, the like of which no country had yet known.

Lenin defined the Soviets in this way: "Soviet power is the road to socialism that was discovered by the masses of the working people, and that is why it is the true road, that is why it is invincible."

The leader of the proletarian revolution wrote: ". . . **the people themselves, universally armed** and united in the Soviets, must run the state." These prophetic words have been confirmed by more than half a century of the history of the Soviet state.

October 1917 marked the beginning of the victorious march of the Soviets in the country whose people were taking power into their own hands.

Addressing the Sixth All-Russia Extraordinary Congress of Soviets in November 1918, Y. Sverdlov, the first Central Executive Committee Chairman, said: "We may confidently state

that all over the face of Russia Soviet power stands firm and unshakable."

The victorious proletariat exercised its power, both nationally and locally, through the Soviets. This was set down in the first Soviet Constitution where it was written that the Soviets of Working People's Deputies are the political foundation of the USSR, the embodiment of people's power.

The First Congress of Soviets of the USSR took place on December 30, 1922. The delegates endorsed the Declaration and Treaty of the establishment of a united Soviet state—a voluntary fraternal association of equal peoples.

An entire historical period separates the first Soviets born in the fire of revolutionary battles by the people themselves, and the Soviets as they are today, after more than half a century of trial and experience.

The Constitution lays down that the highest organ of state power in the USSR is the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with its Presidium; the highest organs of state power in union and autonomous republics are the Supreme Soviets and Presidiums of union and autonomous republics; local organs of state power are the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR is the highest representative body in the Soviet Union. The Constitution rules that it must be elected by the citizens for a term of four years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR takes decisions on all major questions of home and foreign policy and exercises all rights

vested under the Constitution in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It approves the economic plans of the USSR and its single state budget, decides upon questions of war and peace, exercises control over the observance of the Constitution of the USSR and ensures the conformity of the Constitutions of the union republics with the Constitution of the USSR which it amends when necessary. Admission of new republics to the Union, as well as changes in boundaries between union republics are subject to approval by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The legislative power of the USSR is exercised exclusively by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The latter elects the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, forms the Council of Ministers of the USSR, elects the Supreme Court of the USSR, and appoints the country's Procurator-General. All these bodies are accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR appoints commissions of inquiry and audit whenever the necessity arises.

Sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are convened twice a year. The Presidium may call extraordinary sessions at its discretion or on the demand of one of the union republics.

As the plenary sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are only held twice a year and for only a short space of time, another supreme organ of state power is required. This body is the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The Presidium consisting of 37 elected deputies functions permanently in the intervals between the sessions of the Supreme

Soviet of the USSR. The Presidium carries on the work of the Supreme Soviet and is accountable to it. All union republics are represented in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which is rightly considered to be the collective head of the state.

Since it must express the specific interests of each nationality as well as the common interests of all working people, the Supreme Soviet is made up of two equal Chambers: **the Soviet of the Union** and **the Soviet of Nationalities.**

The Soviet of the Union represents the interests of all Soviet working people, irrespective of their nationality or the republic in which they reside. The Soviet of Nationalities represents the interests arising from the national characteristics of the peoples living in the USSR. The Soviet of the Union is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 300,000 of the population, and the Soviet of Nationalities, on the basis of 32 deputies from each of the 15 union republics, 11 deputies from each autonomous republic, 5 deputies from each autonomous region, and one deputy from each national area. The result is full and equal representation in the Soviet of Nationalities. Thus, each union republic is represented in the Chamber by an equal number of deputies, irrespective of the size of its population. The vast Russian Federation (RSFSR), with a population of about 130 million, and the Estonian SSR, whose population is a hundredth part of the RSFSR, for instance, send an equal number of deputies, 32 each, to the Soviet of Nationalities.

The Chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are equal in authority, they are elected for the same term and begin and finish their sessions at the same time.

The two-chamber pattern of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR reflects the fact that the Soviet government system is based on respect for the national interests of each of the peoples inhabiting the USSR. The system underlines the sovereignty of union republics and the rights of autonomous republics and regions and national areas. Since both Chambers are equal and are elected for a four-year term on the same date, every voter on election day casts his ballot, as a citizen of the USSR, for a deputy to the Soviet of the Union and, as an inhabitant of a particular union or autonomous republic, autonomous region or national area, for a deputy to the Soviet of Nationalities. This is fully in line with the character of the Soviet system under which national interests are not set one against another and which rests on mutual respect and the full consideration of the interests of each people.

The Chambers being equal, every law must be passed by both. Should the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities happen to disagree, the matter is referred for settlement to a conciliation commission in which both Chambers are equally represented. Failing a satisfactory solution, the question is considered a second time by the Chambers. If no acceptable solution is reached, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR dissolves the Supreme Soviet and orders new elections. That, however, has never occurred in practice.

The higher organs of state power in the union and autonomous republics, the Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics, are elected and carry out their functions on the same democratic principles as the higher organs of state power of the USSR. Every union and autonomous republic has its Supreme Soviet and its Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. The Supreme Soviet is elected by all citizens of a republic and, since the specific interests of the people are represented in the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, it consists of one Chamber. The laws enacted by the Supreme Soviets of union republics must not contradict the laws of the Union, and the laws of an autonomous republic must not contradict the laws of the union republic of which it is part.

The Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics elect a Supreme Court and form a government. These bodies are subject to the control of, and are accountable to, the Supreme Soviets of republics and, in the intervals between sessions, to the Presidiums of Supreme Soviets.

What, for instance, is the highest representative organ of power of the peoples of Russia, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, like? Possessing, in accordance with the Constitutions of the USSR and the RSFSR, extensive rights and authority, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR organises the republic's economic and cultural development. The Russian Federation has a population of about 130 million people while its territory is equal to three-quarters of the area of the USSR. In accordance with the

Constitution of the RSFSR, the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, as represented by its higher organs of power, covers the following: establishment of the Constitution of the RSFSR, endorsement of the constitutions of autonomous Soviet socialist republics, submission for the approval of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of requests for the formation of new autonomous republics and regions within the RSFSR, approval of the boundaries and division into districts of autonomous republics and regions, the division of the RSFSR into territories and regions and the boundaries of districts of territories and regions, legislation for the RSFSR and a whole range of other major questions. Accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the republic are all the other higher organs of power and higher executive and administrative organs of the republic.

As in other union republics, Chairmen of the Presidiums of all autonomous republics which are members of the RSFSR have a place in the republic's Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

The RSFSR comprises 16 autonomous republics, 5 autonomous regions, and 10 national areas. More than 100 nationalities live in the RSFSR.

Some of the autonomous republics are fairly large. The Tatar ASSR, for instance, has a population of 3,043,000. Under Soviet government the republic has become one of the large industrial bases of central Russia, with intensive and highly developed agriculture. The oil fields of the republic will account for a third of the total amount of oil to be produced in the USSR under the current five-year plan. The

Bashkir ASSR, with a population of 3,663,000, has become one of the key centres in the Soviet Union for both the oil and chemical industries.

The local Soviets of Working People's Deputies enjoy full power in towns and villages and are an integral part of the Soviet Union's system of state power. Their structure corresponds to the administrative-territorial division of the USSR. This means that every administrative-territorial unit, every territory, region, district, city or town, municipal district, township and village, has its own Soviet of Working People's Deputies elected for a term of two years and exercising state power in that area.

The local Soviets—of which there are more than 50,000 in the Soviet Union—are in charge of all economic, political and cultural development within their areas. They approve the local budget, supervise the activities of the administrative bodies subordinate to them, ensure public order and observance of the laws. They protect the citizens' rights and interests and help strengthen the country's defence capacity.

Local self-government rests on the same democratic principles inherent in the Soviet government system as a whole. Its activity is guided by the instructions of the electors; it has broad powers, enjoying the right to hold discussions on any matters, including those of significance for the Union as well, and submit proposals to higher bodies.

At their sessions local Soviets discuss and take decisions on matters within their jurisdiction. Regional and territorial Soviets, as well as the larger city Soviets, hold sessions at least

four times a year, and town and rural Soviets, at least once every two months.

To carry out their functions, local Soviets (except rural Soviets) elect Executive Committees and set up various sections and departments. The task of these bodies is to carry out the voters' instructions. Executive Committees are accountable to their Soviets and regularly report back to them.

Principles of Organisation

The unity of the higher and local organs of power is a key principle of the organisation of the entire Soviet system. There is one single state power—it is not divided into legislative power and executive power, for that would result in their unavoidably being set in opposition to each other, or (as is the case in some bourgeois parliamentary republics) in centrally appointed officials, representing the executive, being set over local government bodies.

The Soviets, Lenin wrote, "... concentrate in their hands not only the legislative power and supervision of law enforcement, but direct enforcement of the laws through all the members of the Soviets with a view to a gradual transition to the performance of legislative functions and state administration by the whole working population."

The Soviets are the sole basis of the state apparatus; they form the Union and republican governments and the local state apparatus, all of which are accountable to them, and determine their activities.

Both the higher and local bodies of government are links of a single state power: they have a uniform socio-political character. They are elected on the basis of uniform suffrage, the functions of government are performed with the broadest possible participation of the public, and they include representatives of all social sections and groups of the population. The Soviets have set up over 300,000 standing committees and nearly 8,000 departments staffed by voluntary workers. Twenty-five million activists are assisting the more than two million deputies to perform their state functions.

At each election usually more than 50 per cent of the deputies elected are returned for the first time: thus more and more citizens pass through the Soviets and have a chance to study in this school of state management.

The socialist democratic character of state power in the USSR also finds expression in the fact that all Soviets are elected, they are set up on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. As organs of power, the Soviets are accountable to the people. The Soviets and their deputies regularly report back to the voters, who can recall any deputy before his term is up, if he fails to justify their trust.

Every Soviet deputy reports back to the voters once a year. All this strengthens the link between deputies and voters.

In the Soviet Union elections, besides being a method of forming the organs of power, are an important means of involving the masses in the management of the country's affairs. In the course of preparations for an election the citizens hold voters' meetings at which they dis-

cuss the Soviets' achievements, criticise shortcomings, make their suggestions for the improvement of the performance of state and economic bodies, and give instructions to their nominees. For instance, in the summer of 1973, during preparation for the local Soviet elections, the Executive Committee of the Sterlitamak Town Soviet gave a report of its activities during the previous year at 211 meetings; this meant that nearly the whole of the adult population of the town heard the report. At these meetings, the voters made dozens of proposals aimed at improving the work conducted by the Executive Committee in the economic, cultural and other fields. The Executive Committee examined and summed up these proposals, drew up measures for carrying them out.

District Soviet Executives reported back on their work at all village Soviets and collective farm centres and large populated areas.

Sovereignty of the Soviets is a major principle of state development in the USSR. The rights that the Soviets enjoy under the law they exercise absolutely in the areas under their jurisdiction. This means that the decisions of the Soviet come before those of any other body and are binding on everybody. The Supreme Soviets of the USSR, union and autonomous republics thus have an exclusive right to promulgate laws. They invest Soviet state plans and budget with a binding force and direct the activities of the state apparatus. As they annually consider and approve economic development plans and the state budget, the Soviets, in fact, set the annual targets of the further growth of

the Soviet economy and supervise their fulfilment.

In exercising absolute power in their areas, the local Soviets—the broadest and most numerous organs of state power—map out the programme of action for the executive bodies and the key measures that need to be taken to encourage the promotion of economic, social and cultural development in their locality. In 1972, for example, the local Soviets considered 122,000 questions concerning industrial and agricultural production, 89,000 questions concerning public education, culture, public health and social security, 38,000 questions concerning trade, public catering, services and town and village improvement, 51,000 questions concerning the observance of socialist legality and public order, and 7,500 questions concerning work among youth.

The funds available to the local Soviets are increasing from year to year. The district Executive Committees have at their disposal a part of the profit made by the service establishments, local industries and municipal services, and a part of the turnover tax on consumer goods produced over and above the plan. Today the Soviets control more than 800,000 service establishments of various kinds. At the beginning of 1972 in the RSFSR alone more than 9,000 enterprises, establishments and organisations and more than 1,700 municipal service centres numbering altogether more than half a million workers were turned over to the Executive Committees of the district and town Soviets. Apart from these sources of income the district and town Soviets receive a

proportion of the profit made by the enterprises and economic organisations subordinated to republican or regional (territorial) bodies. This acts as an appreciable boost to the local budget which in 1972 reached a total of 30,000 million roubles, compared with 23,200 million roubles in 1965.

In the USSR, which is a multinational state, the Soviets, in their activity, unfailingly pursue the principle of the equality of nations. All peoples inhabiting the USSR enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities to solve nationality problems in a way that meets the interests of the whole of society. The very composition of the Soviets testifies to this. At the last elections to the Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics, deputies of 66 nationalities were returned, and at the elections to the local Soviets deputies of over 100 nationalities were returned. Such a truly multinational composition of the Soviets is a guarantee that all decisions on matters of Union importance will take into account both the interests of the country as a whole and the interests of every people and national group living within the area under the jurisdiction of that particular Soviet. Apart from this, the protection of the interests of every people and national group at the Union level is ensured by the existence of the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The relationship between Soviets of all levels is based on the principle of democratic centralism. This makes it possible to combine centralised management with the greatest possible creative initiative of the masses. Lenin explained thoroughly the need for rigorous democra-

tic centralism during the struggle against the anarchists who were demanding extensive decentralisation and those who came out for complete centralism. Lenin emphasised that the Bolsheviks supported a centralism based on democratic principles, that they were creating not just a centralised, but a democratic centralised state based on the great mass of working people.

Democratic centralism manifests itself in the present functioning of the Soviets in a great variety of ways: the way the Soviets are elected by working people themselves, the existence of the executive and administrative bodies set up by the Soviets and accountable to them, the subordination of the lower to the higher Soviets, and the fact that the local Soviets superintend all local bodies of state administration. The more than fifty years of practical experience has shown that such a system makes it possible to combine centralised management with extensive local initiative.

The entire history of the Soviets since the October revolution of 1917 has proved conclusively **that daily supervision by the Communist Party is the paramount condition of their successful work.** The Party decides on the programme of activities, questions that the organs of the state must tackle and the methods to be used. The enhancement of the role and significance of the Soviets and development of all aspects of their activities have always been regarded by the Communist Party as the main way to go about further strengthening the Soviet state. At all elections Party members form a bloc with the non-Party people; this has be-

come possible because of the unity of Soviet society. Thus in June 1973, just as in the previous elections to the local Soviets, the CPSU and the non-Party people campaigned on a single platform. Communist Party members accounted for 44, and non-Party people for over 56 per cent of the deputies elected.

Working people take part in administering the country not only through the Soviets and the state apparatus but also through an extensive network of mass public organisations of working people, uniting millions of people. Trade unions alone have a membership of 100 million. That is why in the Soviet Union any worker, farmer, or intellectual has every reason to say: the Soviet state is ourselves, its policy is our own policy, the task of developing and building up the socialist state and defending it is our common task.

The Electoral System in the USSR

To form a rough idea of the electoral system in any country, it is sufficient for one to know:

Who elects the organ of state power?

Who represents the people in it?

After the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, the people of Russia for the first time became the real masters of their country's destiny. On the territory of the former Russian Empire socialist democracy was born and continued to develop—this democracy is representative and just and involves the broadest pos-

sible participation of the masses in the management of society and the state. Not only does it afford the working people extensive rights and liberties but it is a guarantee that these rights and liberties are implemented in practice. The Soviets are the basis of the democratic system and the main form of people's government.

The Soviet people elect this government themselves. Its bodies include representatives of the broad sections of working people. 1,517 deputies were elected to the 1970 Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Who are these people? 481 of them are industrial workers, 282 are farmers, 146 are scientists, cultural figures and writers, 57 are servicemen, 217 are executives of Soviet institutions, 73 are factory managers and experts, 241 are CPSU officials, and 20 are trade union and Young Communist League leaders. As we see, every single class and section of the Soviet working people is represented in the highest organ of state power.

All organs of state power in the USSR are built on the principle of authentic popular representation. The Soviet representation system is based on a close link with the masses, electivity and replaceability of deputies, responsibility and accountability of the deputy to the constituents, combination of a deputy's activities with a permanent job at a factory, office, etc. Lenin observed that "the masses must have the right to choose responsible leaders for themselves. They must have the right to replace them, the right to know and check each smallest step of their activity."

There are no full-time parliamentarians in the USSR. Any Soviet deputy combines his activi-

lies in the Soviet with his main job in production. Throughout the term for which they have been elected, deputies continue to work in the factories, offices, fields, collective or state farms: in a word, they go on with the jobs they were doing before they were elected. This is what ensures a permanent practical link between the representative and electorate, what gives a deputy intimate knowledge of the interests and hopes of the people who have elected him, what makes him indentify himself with these interests and indefatigably translate them into practice as a member of a Soviet.

Soviet deputies receive no parliamentary salary or remuneration. The law allows the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR a monthly grant of 100 roubles, and deputies of republican Supreme Soviets, 50 roubles a month—to cover the expenses involved in their public work, such as correspondence, travelling, etc. Deputies can use municipal transport, such as buses, trolleybuses, trams and the underground, as well as water and railway transport free of charge. Deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are allowed free travel on all internal flights and deputies of republican Supreme Soviets on flights within the boundaries of the republic.

The principle, recognised in some countries, according to which a deputy, from the moment of his election, becomes independent of the constituents, is alien to the Soviet system. The Constitution requires a deputy to report back to his constituents on his work, on how he carries out their instructions. The principle of re-

calling a deputy who has failed to justify the trust of his electorate applies to all Soviets—from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Now let us turn to the Soviet electoral system. The term "electoral system" refers to the legal statutes on electing organs of state power, organising and holding elections, and calculating the results. In the Soviet Union, elections to all Soviets are held in accordance with the Constitution of the USSR and constitutions of union and autonomous republics. The election process is stringently regulated by the Election Statute which accords with the constitutional principles of the electoral system and covers elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics, and local Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Features of the Soviet electoral system include: extensive participation of citizens in the preparation and holding of elections, broad rights of control over the election campaign, election procedure and the counting of votes exercised through the election committees, public organisations and associations and bodies of working people, organisation of elections completely at government expense, and nomination of candidates exclusively by public organisations and working people's associations at general meetings of voters. All deputies are elected by the people. No Soviet deputy enjoys a hereditary right to a seat, is appointed by the head of state, or has been given this honour by dint of his official position. Deputies are elected for the term of the Soviet's office and may con-

tinue at their post only if re-elected in the regular fashion. Therefore, every election sees workers, farmers, and intellectuals taking up their duties as deputies for the first time.

The basic principles of the Soviet electoral system were promulgated soon after the 1917 revolution in the Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People, and were subsequently embodied in the first Soviet Constitution—the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR.

As the Soviet state developed and advanced, the electoral system was refined, its principles becoming more and more democratic.

In the early years of Soviet rule, during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, there were voting restrictions for some categories of citizens. In view of the opposition put up by the remnants of the exploiting classes, the 1918 Constitution withdrew suffrage from those living on an unearned income. There were different electoral quotas for the urban and rural population, which were weighted in the workers' favour. Only town and village Soviets were elected by direct suffrage while the higher organs of Soviet power were elected at Congresses of Soviets.

By 1936, socialism had triumphed and the economy and the class structure of Soviet society had consequently changed radically. The exploiting classes had been finally abolished. The two classes that remained—the working class and the collective-farm peasantry—were not antagonistic and a new Soviet working intelligentsia had emerged. The triumph of socialism in the USSR made possible fresh steps towards a more democratic electoral system.

The 1936 Constitution of the USSR abolished all voting restrictions and defined the principles which would provide for the more democratic election of all organs of power in the Soviet Union.

The Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Red Armymen's Deputies were reorganised into the Soviets of Working People's Deputies. The somewhat limited suffrage was replaced by **universal** suffrage, the not quite equal election was replaced by **equal** election, instead of election by stages, **direct** election was introduced and open ballot was replaced by **secret ballot.**

These alterations in the electoral system further enhanced the prestige of the organs of Soviet power, strengthened their ties with the working people and resulted in increased political activity of the masses, firmer people's control over the activities of the organs of the Soviet state, and the greater responsibility of these organs to the people.

Principles underlying the formation of the organs of state power determine not only their composition, but their practical functioning as well. The democratic character of an organ of power largely depends on how it is elected, on which sections of the population have the right of nomination, on how much chance they are given to express their choice by ballot, and on the extent to which the election procedure ensures that the will of the people is reflected in the results of the election. The Soviet electoral system, effective since 1936, guarantees the citizens **universal, equal** and **direct elections by secret ballot.**

Universal elections. In the Soviet Union, all citizens—the young and the old, soldiers and students, nationalities of millions and nationalities of a few hundred—have the right to vote. Under the Constitution of the USSR, and, accordingly, the constitutions of union and autonomous republics, all citizens who have reached the age of eighteen, irrespective of race or nationality, sex, religion, education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities, have the right to vote in the election of deputies, with the exception of persons who have been legally certified insane. Those who are unable to vote—who are abroad, in remote areas or in custody, naturally, take no part in that particular election.

The law establishes no residence qualification, whereby a citizen, in order to be eligible to vote, is required to reside for a certain length of time within the boundaries of the administrative unit or electoral district where the election is taking place.

The Soviet electoral system deprives no one of the vote on account of their social origin or social status. The social structure of Soviet society is characterised by the existence of friendly classes and sections of the working people. For example, among the 884 deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR of the 7th convocation there are at present 271 workers, 150 collective farmers and 69 scientists and workers in the field of culture, public education and health. Workers and collective farmers immediately engaged in production account for 67.2 per cent of local Soviet deputies. In the Ukrainian SSR, workers and collective farmers ac-

count for 72.12 per cent, in the Uzbek SSR for 67.95 per cent, and in the Latvian SSR for 66.70 per cent.

The Soviet Constitution guarantees to all citizens an equal opportunity to exercise their rights and liberties, while those who infringe these rights and try to stir up national enmity are severely punished by law.

The electoral system reflects the equality, friendship and brotherhood of the peoples of the multinational Soviet country. All Soviet people, irrespective of race or nationality, take part in elections and may be elected to any organ of state power. Thus, the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the 8th convocation represent 58 of the nationalities of the Soviet Union. The deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR of the 7th convocation represent 37 nationalities. Among the deputies elected to the RSFSR local Soviets in 1973 there are men and women of 116 nationalities.

The principle of universal suffrage also means that the circumstances of sex, religion, education, domicile, property status and past activities involve neither advantages nor restrictions. On December 25, 1958, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a law annulling deprivation of suffrage by a court decision, thereby removing the very last restriction of suffrage, which used to be imposed on persons who had committed grave crimes.

The only qualification is the stipulation of age at which a citizen becomes eligible for election. A citizen may be elected to a local Soviet upon

reaching the age of eighteen; to the Supreme Soviet of a union or autonomous republic, upon reaching the age of twenty-one; and to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, upon reaching the age of twenty-three. Until 1945, there was a single age qualification in the USSR. Soviet citizens who have reached the age of eighteen could both elect and be elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Subsequently, however, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR introduced an amendment to the Constitution of the USSR to the effect that citizens of the USSR become eligible for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR upon reaching the age of twenty-three. The motivation for this alteration was the great role the Supreme Soviet of the USSR plays in the life of Soviet society. This organ of government enjoys full state power, exercises the legislative function and is responsible for the management and supervision, at the highest state level, of every sphere of economic, political, military and cultural development. Therefore, a USSR Supreme Soviet deputy, who has to take part in preparing, discussing and deciding on major questions vital to the country's well-being, must have experience of life, be politically mature, and also possess sufficient experience in social and labour activities.

Socialist democracy does not merely pay lip service to the principle of universal suffrage but makes sure that it is observed in practice. Thus every effort is taken to draw up the electoral registers in a truly democratic fashion; elections are held on non-working days, polling stations are organised in trains, on board ship, in hospitals and in the remotest areas. Voters

whose state of health does not allow them to visit the polling station are visited, at their request, by representatives of the district election committee. As a result, every citizen, wherever he may be, can take part in the poll.

Equal elections of deputies to the Soviets mean that all voters take part in elections on an equal footing. No voter enjoys any particular privileges or is subject to any restrictions. Every citizen eligible to vote has the one vote; the vote of one voter is equal to that of any other, be the one an ordinary factory worker and another a Minister.

One of the major gains of the October revolution, the political equality of women, is reflected in the Soviet electoral system. Women take part in elections and may be elected to the Soviets on equal terms with men. This principle is unswervingly carried out. Thus nearly a third of the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are women, which is more than any capitalist parliament can boast. 299 women, or 33.8 per cent of the total number, are deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Women account for over 47 per cent of the deputies to local Soviets.

Servicemen have the right to elect and be elected on equal terms with all other citizens. There are 56 servicemen among the deputies of the present Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Under the Election Statute citizens have the right to elect and be elected in a republic other than their own on equal terms with the citizens of that republic.

Equal suffrage also means that the represen-

tation quota for each electoral district is the same. Every electoral district returns one deputy.

Any Soviet citizen who has reached the age required by law and has the right to vote can elect, be nominated and elected, irrespective of race or nationality, religion, education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities.

Direct elections mean that all organs of state power, from rural and city Soviets to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, are elected by the people residing within the boundaries of the Soviet in question. The voters themselves—not through any special bodies or persons—elect their deputies. This strengthens the link between deputies and constituents and makes it easier for the latter to check on the deputies' performance, which, in turn, gives the deputies, and consequently the Soviets, a greater sense of responsibility to the people who have elected them. For example, before the elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies, i.e., before June 1973, all local Soviets' Executive Committees had reported to their constituents on their work. The meetings were attended by over 47 million voters, i.e. by almost one-third of the electorate.

Deputies regularly report back to the constituents. Many of them make two or more reports. In 1972, for example, 98.8 per cent of the local Soviets' deputies reported back to their constituents.

Secret ballot. Under the Constitution, deputies to all Soviets are elected by secret ballot; thus every voter is absolutely free to express his choice.

Every voter puts his ballot paper, personally

and independently of other persons, into a ballot box sealed by the election committee. All ballot papers used at elections to one particular level of Soviet are identical, and special booths or rooms, to be used by one person at a time, are set up for the voters to mark the ballot papers. The presence of anybody in the booth or room with the voter is strictly prohibited. Besides enabling the voters to express their choice freely, without any outside pressures, secret ballot is a means of controlling and criticising a deputy's performance.

Everything connected with the preparation for and holding of elections is done by the voters themselves. This is yet another democratic feature of the Soviet electoral system. In the pre-election period millions of citizens take an active part in the work of the election committees and canvass for the candidates. Take, for example, the Central Election Committee in charge of the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the 8th convocation (1970). Its chairman was Victor Yermilov, a worker of the Moscow "Krasny Proletari" Machine-Tool Factory. The committee included Chairman of the Crimean "Druzhba Narodov" state farm, Ilya Yegudin, Maria Biyeshu, of the Moldavian Opera and Ballet Theatre, the prominent Soviet scientist, Academician Ivan Artobolevsky, the writer Nikolai Tikhonov, besides trade union, Party and YCL functionaries. Although such a committee has to cope with a great amount of social work, all the members combine this work with their regular jobs.

The democratic principles of the Soviet electoral system ensure the voters the greatest pos-

sible opportunity to take a voluntary and, moreover, active and decisive part in the election of the bodies of state power.

The democratic character of the Soviet electoral system stimulates the voters' civic activity. Practically all Soviet citizens eligible to vote take part in elections to the Soviets. More than 99 per cent of the voters usually come to the polls. In June 1970, 99.96 per cent of the voters took part in the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The candidates for the Soviet of the Union polled 99.74 per cent of the votes cast, and the candidates for the Soviet of Nationalities polled 99.64 per cent of the votes cast. In 1973, 99.94 per cent of the total electorate took part in the elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

The democratic character of the Soviet electoral system also expresses itself in the way the **electoral districts** and **polling stations** are organised and the **electoral registers** are compiled, in the **nomination procedure,** and **in the very way the poll is conducted.**

The Electoral Districts

The law lays down that elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Supreme Soviets of the 15 union and 20 autonomous republics must take place every four years. Elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies take place every two years.

The start of an election campaign is marked by Decrees issued by the Presidium of the Su-

preme Soviet of the USSR or a union or autonomous republic to the effect that as the term of office of the old Soviets has expired new deputies are to be elected. These Decrees are published in the newspapers. The day of the elections is appointed. This marks the opening of the election campaign. The working people themselves are enlisted to prepare for and conduct the elections. Millions of citizens take part in this work on a voluntary basis. During the 1973 elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies, for example, 9 million representatives of public organisations and collectives of working people took part in various election committees.

An election campaign consists of several stages: first, the organisation of electoral districts, wards and election committees, the compiling of electoral registers, nomination and registration of candidates. Following this, meetings with the candidates are arranged and canvassing gets under way. Finally, there comes the last stage—the election day, the poll, and the count.

All the expenses involved in the holding of elections, as we have already mentioned, are covered by the state. This ensures that the voters are really independent of all pressures and absolutely free to express their will at the elections.

Candidates for any organ of state power in the USSR, from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to the local Soviets, are nominated from electoral districts. Because of this, the organisation of electoral districts is an important point of the election preparations for it determines the actual sections of the population entitled to elect a deputy as well as fixes in advance the size of

the Chambers of the Supreme Soviet, the organs of power in the republics and the local Soviets. Lastly, the organisation of electoral districts defines the boundaries within which the campaign for the election of each deputy will be conducted.

Electoral districts for the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are decided upon by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and for the elections to the Supreme Soviets of union or autonomous republics by their Supreme Soviet Presidiums. Electoral districts for local Soviet elections are organised by the local Soviet Executive Committees.

Every electoral district has its number and name. A definite building (in the case of cities or towns) or village (in the case of rural districts), in which the district election committee will have its seat, is appointed the centre of the electoral district. A full list is prepared of the towns, districts, and in some cases, of workers' settlements and village Soviets which lie within the boundaries of the electoral district.

The list of electoral districts is published at least forty days before the elections.

Apart from the size of population, other factors taken into account when electoral districts are being organised include: the current administrative-territorial division, position of the populated areas, available rooms for election committees and polling stations, transportation and communication facilities.

Electoral districts are organised in line with the electoral quotas established by the relevant Election Statute covering elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Supreme Soviets of

union republics and local Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Representation quotas for the Soviets are an important democratic principle of the Soviet electoral system. The Constitution stipulates that all electoral districts must be equal as regards the size of population. This requirement cannot be waived. Every deputy represents an equal number of citizens, and every voter has an equal opportunity to influence the Soviet through his deputy.

Now, what are these quotas?

Under the Constitution of the USSR, the Soviet of the Union is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 300,000 of the population. In the case of the Soviet of Nationalities, electoral districts are organised in a different way because this Chamber reflects the national composition of the country. Each of the 15 union republics sends 32 deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities, an autonomous republic (of which there are 20 in the USSR)—11 deputies, an autonomous region (there are 8 of these)—5 deputies and a national area (there are 10 of them)—one deputy.

Every union republic sets a different quota for each level of the Soviets. The Statute on the election of local Soviets in the Russian Federation states that a territorial or regional Soviet is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 7,000, a district Soviet is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 1,000, and a village Soviet is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 100 of the population. In other union republics, these quotas—in view of national and local distinctions, such as, for instance, popula-

tion density—may be different. In the Ukrainian SSR, a regional Soviet is elected on the basis of one deputy for every 10,000 of population, while in the Byelorussian SSR and the Kazakh SSR the corresponding quota is one for 5,000.

In the RSFSR, electoral districts for the elections to the regional Soviets in autonomous republics are organised for every 2,000 residents; in the Georgian SSR for every 1,000. In the Tajik SSR, they are formed for every 700 of the population.

The quotas for the electoral districts for the elections to town or city Soviets are fixed according to the size of the city's population and the specific conditions prevailing in this or that republic. In the RSFSR, for instance, in towns with a population between 15,000 and 100,000 one electoral district is set up for every 300 residents. In towns with a population of from 100,000 to 300,000 there is one electoral district for every 400 of the population. In towns with a population of from 300,000 to 500,000 people, each electoral district is set up for every 850 persons.

The RSFSR in particular has many towns with over 500,000 inhabitants. Here an electoral district is formed for every 1,100 residents. And in such large cities as Moscow and Leningrad, one electoral district has as many as 6,000 people.

The electoral quotas are higher, the larger the population.

The Election Statute also fixes the lowest (no less than 35), and in some cases the highest (no more than 500), number of electoral districts allowed to be formed for the elections

to local Soviets of one kind or another (all electoral districts are, of course, of equal size). Deputies to one kind of Soviet, let it be repeated, always represent the same number of citizens.

Why has it been necessary to establish the lowest and highest possible limits to the number of electoral districts? The reason is that one needs representative organs of power that work well. Practice has shown that Soviets with a small number of deputies find it more difficult to manage economic and cultural development in their areas. So, it is established in all republics that the number of electoral districts for electing a regional Soviet may not be smaller than 100, for electing a town Soviet not less than 50 and in the case of a village Soviet the required minimum is 25 districts. Too many deputies are also undesirable.

The Election Committees

The election campaign and the poll itself are conducted by election committees. These are composed—in accordance with the Election Statute—of representatives of trade unions, cooperatives, Party organisations, youth organisations, cultural, technological and scientific associations and other public organisations, as well as of representatives of factories, organisations, institutions, collective and state farms, and military units.

Election committees are set up on strictly democratic principles. Candidates are nomina-

ted at general meetings of working people, appropriate boards or committees of public organisations and associations, and grass-root public organisations.

Practice over the years has shown that people nominate their best representatives for these election committees—active public workers, leading workers and collective farmers, Party and Soviet officials, staff members of social and cultural institutions.

Every election committee must be approved by the proper authority within the term set down in the Election Statute.

Under the Election Statute, the following committees must be set up:

(a) **central** election committees, to preside over elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics;

(b) **territorial, regional, autonomous region, national area, administrative district, town and village** election committees, to preside over elections to the respective Soviets of Working People's Deputies;

(c) **district** committees, to preside over elections in the electoral districts returning deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics, and local Soviets of Working People's Deputies;

(d) **divisional** election committees.

Central election committees are approved by the respective Presidiums of Supreme Soviets at least forty days before the elections. They are responsible for seeing that the Election Statute is observed strictly, investigating complaints lodged against election committees, de-

ciding on the shape and colour of the ballot papers, etc., approving the ballot boxes and election committees' seals to be used, and registering the deputies returned.

The work of central election committees is always given wide publicity; announcements concerning their activities are published in the press and spotlighted on radio and television.

Supreme Soviet Presidiums, too, discuss the preparation for and holding of elections. Before the 1973 elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR thoroughly discussed the progress of the election campaign. One fact, among others, that called their attention was that more than 1.1 million electoral districts had been organised in the RSFSR to elect deputies to more than 27,000 local Soviets—10,000 districts more than at the 1971 elections. Since the elections were held in summer, the Presidium was particularly careful to provide conditions enabling those who, on June 17, would be travelling or be in remote and out-of-the-way places or would be staying at resorts, etc. to place their vote. For this purpose, additional polling stations were organised at railway stations and airports, as well as on ships and in trains.

Administrative district, town, municipal district and village election committees are put in charge of elections to the respective Soviets of Working People's Deputies. Their authority must be endorsed by the Executive Committees of superior Soviets at least forty days before the elections.

Practice has shown that most election com-

mittees begin to carry out their duties directly they have been approved. At their first meetings, the committees draw up a plan of work for the entire term of their activity, hear reports (usually by the Secretaries of Executive Committees on the progress of the technical side of the preparations for the elections) and decide on a rota. Later on, they discuss the results of the registration of candidates and of the meetings arranged between candidates and constituents, debate the reports submitted to them by divisional election committee chairmen, and take up other relevant matters.

District election committees, which are set up in every electoral district, are responsible for conducting the elections in accordance with the Election Statute. The district election committee registers a candidate once they have made sure that he was nominated in accordance with the Constitution and the Election Statute. The committee has to register all the nominated candidates.

Another no less responsible duty of the district election committees is to ascertain the results of the poll on the strength of the counts made by the divisional election committees.

Election committees can truly be said to be mass organisations of the working people. Their composition is the best proof of this. Over 1.3 million persons, nearly 600,000 of them women, worked in the election committees at the last elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Communists accounted for over 46 per cent of the aggregate membership of the election committees; the rest were non-Party people. At the 1973 elections to the local So-

viets of Working People's Deputies, about 9 million citizens participated in the election committees.

The Polling Station

At a polling station ballot papers are issued and collected in, votes are counted, and the results declared. This is why it is very important that polling stations should be properly organised.

Polling stations are organised on a territorial principle. The main aim is to provide the most favourable conditions for voting, so that the secrecy of ballot be guaranteed and the elector is able to freely exercise his or her right to take part in the elections.

In towns, polling stations are set up by the Executive Committees of the town Soviets, in cities divided into municipal districts they are set up by district Soviet Executives, and in rural areas, by the Executive Committees of the Soviets of administrative districts. The Executive Committees assign a number to each polling station.

The same polling stations serve for elections to all Soviets whose deputies are being elected in the area. Should elections to the local Soviets and Supreme Soviets of the USSR, union or autonomous republics be held on the same day, a voter, on coming to the polling station, receives several different ballot papers at once.

Polling stations are set up at least 30 days before the elections. One polling station serves from 500 to 3,000 people.

Separate polling stations may be organised for the military units of the Armed Forces: each station must serve no less than 50 and no more than 3,000 voters. The number of polling stations, as well as the allotted number of constituents, is set by the unit commanders, with the consent of the Executive Committees of the relative Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

The Soviet electoral system also takes into account the specific conditions of water, rail and air transport: individual polling stations may be set up on ships which are at sea on the polling day, where there are at least 20 voters on board. Such polling stations belong to the electoral districts of which the vessels' home ports are part.

Polling stations are also set up on long-distance passenger trains and at large railway stations and airports. Passengers may cast their votes at these stations so long as they have with them voting certificates issued at their place of residence.

All passenger trains that will be travelling right through polling day, as well as trains leaving before 10 a.m. and arriving at their destination after 8 p.m. local time are equipped with polling stations.

Such stations are set up by the Executive Committees of district, town, municipal district Soviets on the instructions of the Executive Committees of superior Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Polling stations are usually housed in the finest public buildings—clubs, palaces of culture, libraries, etc. All expenses are covered by the state.

At the 1973 elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies 170,000 polling stations were set up, and about 2 million citizens took part in the work involved.

Population migration in the period between elections and the continuous population growth, in towns and cities in particular, require that new polling stations be constantly set up. To quote an example: at the June 1966 elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR there were about 162,000 polling stations. In the eight years between 1958 and 1966, the number of polling stations had increased by more than 14,000. At the June 1970 elections, this number was several thousands larger still.

Divisional election committees are set up in every polling district. They serve for conducting elections to all local Soviets and, should these coincide with elections to Supreme Soviets of the USSR, union or autonomous republics, for conducting elections to all Soviets, that are being held on the territory of the polling district. There is a single and very important distinction between the divisional election committee and all others—it both conducts the poll and counts the votes cast.

Nomination of candidates for the divisional election committee usually begins a month or more before election day. The most respected workers, collective farmers, office workers and representatives of the intelligentsia capable of carrying out responsible duties are put forward. The committees may include representatives of trade unions, co-operatives, Party organisations, youth organisations, cultural, technical and scientific societies and other public

organisations and associations of working people.

Candidates for the divisional election committees are nominated at general meetings at factories, offices, educational establishments, military units, collective and state farms.

The minutes of such meetings are presented to the local Soviets whose job it is to endorse the committee lists. This is done at least 25 days before the elections and the lists are published in the local press or as separate handbills.

The size of a divisional election committee depends on the number of people residing in the territory of the polling district. It must have, including the chairman, his deputy and the secretary, not less than 7 and not more than 11 members.

I happened to have chaired several divisional election committees in connection with elections to the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the RSFSR and the Moscow city and district Soviets.

One of these committees, responsible for conducting elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, the Moscow Soviet and the Soviet of a municipal district in Moscow, consisted of 11 persons. Two of them had been nominated by the Party organisations, one by the YCL, two by the trade unions, and the rest by various bodies of workers belonging to different factories and offices situated within the territory of the electoral district.

Besides matters directly concerned with the elections, a divisional election committee has to

attend to many other things. Throughout the period of its existence it keeps closely in touch with the constituents and hears not only what the latter have to say about slips and omissions in the electoral register or violations—if there are any—of the Election Statute but also their complaints about, say, poor service in the shops, and suggestions on possible improvements. Since the election committee is in close contact with the local Soviet, constituents often come to the committee with their suggestions on how to improve the running of organisations under the Soviet's charge. The divisional election committee informs the Soviet about all such complaints and suggestions, which are made at personal interviews or by letter, and takes measures to have the constituents' requests granted.

It is the exclusive right of the divisional election committee to issue and receive ballot papers, count the votes cast, and draw up the results of the poll.

Every divisional election committee sees to it that suitable rooms are set aside in good time for the polling station, and that they are properly equipped, to ensure the voters every convenience and, above all, to guarantee the secrecy of the ballot.

I recall how on June 17, the day of the poll, three young Americans visited my polling station. They stood there for an hour, watching people pick up their ballot papers and go into the booths, one by one, to mark them, and they asked me questions about the particulars of the Soviet electoral system. When they were leaving, I asked, "Any more questions?" In answer

one of them gave a thumb-up sign: he approved of what he had seen.

A few days before the elections, the district election committee sends the divisional election committee the necessary number of ballot papers (and some in **reserve**). As there is a five-day working week in the USSR, many people spend the two days off in the countryside, at weekend holiday homes, on hikes, excursions, and so on, and thus cast their votes away from home. At the June 1970 elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, for instance, about 500,000 Muscovites turned up, with their voting certificates, at polling stations outside the city.

Since a divisional election committee has a lot of work to do, establishments (in accordance with the Election Statute) release the chairman or secretary of the divisional election committee from his regular job for the two-week election-period, with full pay.

With the setting up of electoral districts, polling stations, and the divisional election committees, the system of the public bodies directly concerned with the conduct of elections is complete.

Election committees are formed of representatives of public organisations, associations and collectives of working people; they consist of the constituents themselves. This and the fact that they fulfil important functions connected with the preparations and running of elections, is vivid proof that elections to the Soviets are organised and conducted by the people themselves. The present Soviet electoral system has now been functioning for more than thirty years and it is by now clear that these arrange-

ments provide the best possible form of popular supervision of elections.

The Importance of the Electoral Register

In the rooms of the divisional election committee constituents may check whether or not they have been entered in the electoral registers compiled by the Executive Committees of local Soviets.

The electoral register is the document which gives the constituent the right to receive his ballot paper and take part in elections. The register states the name of the town or village, the name of the Soviet to be elected, the number of the electoral district and the name of the respective Soviet. Further follow entries concerning the constituents included in the register.

Electoral registers are so compiled as to include practically the whole of the adult population.

A constituent need not take any steps to be registered: if he lives in the area, no matter how recently he moved there, his name will be included.

No voter may be included in more than one register: equal suffrage is thereby ensured.

All citizens qualified to vote, who reside (whether **permanently** or **temporarily**) on the territory within the jurisdiction of the Soviet and have reached the age of eighteen by the time of the elections, are included in the electoral register.

Electoral registers—which are the same for elections to all Soviets of Working People's Deputies—are compiled by the polling district, in alphabetical order, stating the name, first name and patronymic, age and address of each voter, and the number of the electoral district.

In military units electoral registers are signed by the commanding officer. Members of the Armed Forces who are quartered off the unit's lines are entered in the electoral registers at their place of residence by the Executive Committee of the Soviets.

Under the Election Statute, polling stations are set up at hospitals, maternity homes, sanatoria and infirmaries when there are at least 50 voters among the inmates who will be there on the day of the poll. Those leaving on the day of the poll are also included in the registers.

Those changing their address between the day on which the electoral register is issued and the day of the poll receive from the Soviet voting certificates signed and sealed by the chairman and the secretary of the Soviet Executive Committee. For members of the Armed Forces, such certificates are signed by the unit commanders.

As soon as a certificate is issued, the register is marked "Out" in the appropriate place and the number and date of the certificate are also written down. On presenting the voting certificate and an identity certificate, out-voters can be included in the electoral register, and take part in elections, at any polling station.

To enable the citizens to acquaint themselves with the electoral registers, the latter are

displayed in the rooms of the Soviet or polling stations.

Any voter can drop in to the rooms of the divisional election committee at any time when they are open and personally make sure that the entries concerning himself have been made correctly. If his name has been left out or misspelled or if anything else is wrong, he presents a written note to the executive committee of the Soviet which must be considered within three days.

Should he be dissatisfied with the Executive's decision, the voter may go to the district or city Court which will consider his complaint and inform him of the result.

Candidates Are Nominated by the People

The "Krasny Oktyabr" (Red October) Confectionary, well known for the excellent quality of the sweets it produces, is situated in the centre of Moscow. Since the early years of Soviet rule, this factory has nominated its candidates for the district Soviet and they have invariably polled more than 99 per cent of the voters. The citizens have great confidence in the candidates nominated by the collective of the factory, and they have never yet had reason to regret their choice.

So, as soon as the initial stages of the 1973 election campaign were over—the electoral districts and polling stations had been formed, election committees set up, and the electoral

registers compiled—the workers of the "Krasny Oktyabr" appointed a meeting to select a candidate for the district Soviet.

A fortnight before the general meeting, members of the bureau of the Party organisation and the trade union, the YCL organisation and management who worked in the chocolate shop got together and suggested several candidates for further discussion at the general meeting. They discussed each candidate and everyone seemed to be suitable—all were excellent workers, well-disciplined, had long experience of work on the shop floor, and were greatly respected by the workers. There were 600 people in the shop—and 15 candidates were selected. After a thorough discussion which lasted for three hours, the number was reduced to seven. Still, they needed but one. This is what they decided to do. They decided to recommend all seven and let them be discussed at section and team general meetings. After these meetings, three candidates remained. They were the fitter Vladimir Shevelev and two wrapping machine operators, Tamara Golitsina and Maria Staikova.

These three were proposed for discussion to the general meeting of the confectionery shop. The meeting went on for some hours, thirty people taking the floor. Finally it was resolved to ask 35-year-old non-Party member Tamara Golitsina to stand for the October District Soviet (Moscow) in Electoral District No. 24.

Tamara came to the factory straight after school. She was sixteen then. After a year of free training at the factory apprenticeship school, she began to operate a semi-automatic

machine wrapping the celebrated Soviet chocolates "Truffle", "Mishka" and "Zolotoi Petushok". Soon she was a crack operator. She was an excellent teacher too: every year for seven years she had been given charge of five or six girls just out of the apprenticeship school and taught them so well that in a month or two they could start work on their own.

Tamara has come first in several contests for the best wrapping machine operator in the Soviet food industry, and has been awarded a government Medal for Valiant Labour.

She has been elected trade union organiser of her section for seven years running and everybody in the shop is of the opinion that a better champion of the workers' interests could not be found in the whole of the factory.

The general election meeting of the chocolate shop of the "Krasny Oktyabr" Factory delivered its resolution to the district election committee. After making sure that everything had been done as prescribed by the Election Statute, the committee registered Tamara Golitsina, the confectioners' nominee, as a candidate for the Soviet.

An individual does not have the right to propose himself as a candidate.

Public organisations and associations of working people, such as Party organisations, trade unions, co-operative organisations, youth organisations and cultural societies alone may nominate candidates. Candidates may be nominated by public bodies of all levels as well as by general meetings of personnel of industrial and other establishments, military units, collective farms, and state farms.

Why do bodies of workers and public organisations alone enjoy this right?

It is because they are well acquainted with the people they nominate, with their personal and professional qualities, and know whom they can trust and rely on to represent them in the organs of state power, in the Soviets.

In large industrial enterprises and collective farms, where holding a general meeting is practically impossible, candidates for Soviets are nominated at shop and shift meetings, and in the countryside, at production team meetings arranged in individual villages.

Every member of the meeting may express his opinion about the candidates proposed, raise an objection to a candidate, and propose any other candidate for the meeting's consideration.

Usually election meetings nominate candidates and elect some of their members whose task is to introduce the candidate nominated to constituents' meetings. These people, besides acquainting the constituents with the life and career of the candidate, explain why their colleagues have decided to nominate or second a particular person as a candidate for the Soviet.

In accordance with the Election Statute, a candidate may stand for only one Soviet and only one electoral district. So that he should not influence the count in any way he is not allowed to be a member of the district or any divisional election committee in the electoral district in which he has been nominated.

Nomination of candidates is given wide publicity in the central and local press, in factory

newspapers, and by other media at government expense.

Acquainting the constituents with the candidates nominated by individual establishments and public organisations is one aspect of the nomination of candidates. The other is the selection of the common candidate. For this purpose, meetings are held in establishments other than that which nominated the candidate. They discuss the proposed candidate and decide on whether or not to second him. After a number of such meetings, when the general climate of opinion is clear, election meetings attended by representatives of the public organisations and establishments situated within the electoral district are held. They involve in some instances up to a thousand delegates. After a thorough discussion of all the nominees, the meeting finally selects the one it will support. The candidates rejected by the district election meeting withdraw their names or are withdrawn by their proposers.

A district election meeting usually issues an appeal to the constituents, urging them to vote for the candidate selected.

Although Soviet electoral law allows several candidates to be nominated and to stand for a Soviet in one electoral district, there is usually only the one candidate. This has over the years become traditional practice. The point is that after thorough discussion, in which scores, and sometimes hundreds, of thousands of voters take part, they finally settle on the one whom they believe to be the best qualified to represent them, whether he is a Communist, a YCL member or a non-Party member.

Anyone who wishes may cast his ballot for a candidate standing in another electoral district, even in a different city or republic. For this he merely has to take a voting certificate which entitles him to vote at a different place, anywhere he may wish to.

To enable all constituents to be informed of the candidates in good time, the Election Statute requires candidates for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to be registered at least 30 days before the election, candidates for republican Supreme Soviets, territorial, regional and district Soviets to be registered at least 20 days before the elections, and candidates for town and city, municipal district and rural Soviets to be registered at least 15 days before the elections.

Ten to fifteen days before the elections, the district election committee has to publish in the press or otherwise display each candidate's name, age, Party membership, occupation and collective proposer.

This done, every organisation which has proposed the candidate, and any citizen may canvass for him at meetings, in the press and by other means as well.

Meeting the Constituents

One night in June 1973 a colourful poster was displayed above the door of School No. 62 in Kazan, the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. It said: "Let us cast our votes on election day for the candidates of

the indestructible bloc of Communists and non-Party people." The school assembly hall was full. Nearly 600 people had come to meet those who were to stand for the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies on June 17. The candidates were the rank-and-file shoe-makers of the "Spartak" Amalgamation Burmistrova, Pronina and Derzayeva, the composer Imashev, head of the Tchaikovsky Music School, the stomatologist Shaikhulin—well-known, respected people all of them. The canvassers explained why collectives of working people and public organisations had nominated them, and spoke of their life, their work and their social activities. The constituents taking the floor not only expressed their opinion of the candidates but also proposed measures which they should carry out through the Soviet in order to improve the city's amenities.

Meetings of candidates and constituents are important not merely as a way to introduce the candidates. They are also important because they allow the constituents to tell the candidates what they want them to do in the Soviets. The candidates nominated for a second or a third term use such meetings to report on what they have done to carry out the instructions given them previously.

At the last elections to the local Soviets in 1971, the deputies received hundreds of thousands of instructions covering a great variety of matters concerning state management and economic and cultural development most of which had been carried out by 1973.

How are the instructions drawn up? They are proposed, discussed and endorsed at meet-

ings between the candidates and constituents. Their social character is an important aspect of these instructions, and therefore only those proposals are recognised as instructions which have been discussed and approved by a constituents' meeting. In deciding whether a proposal should or should not be included in the list of instructions, the meeting takes into account how feasible and necessary it is.

Soviet Executive Committees keep account of and analyse the instructions. They group separately those demands which are simple and can be carried out right away, and those which will take time and money to accomplish.

To enable the citizens to get better acquainted with the candidates, election campaign centres are set up in every polling district. The establishments and public organisations which have nominated the candidate appoint canvassers whose duty is to acquaint every voter with their nominee.

The canvassers also discuss politics with voters, telling them about the international activities of the CPSU and its efforts to consolidate peace under present conditions, about what it is doing to translate into practice the national economic development plans, about what is being done by the Soviets to carry out the voters' instructions given at the previous elections.

At the election campaign centres one can consult a lawyer or teacher, getting advice free of charge; have a talk with a canvasser; or just spend some time chatting with friends and watching television.

A schedule is prepared at the beginning of the election campaign which will tell the voter what events are planned to take place at the election campaign centre.

Besides election campaign centres, there are also Voters' Clubs, set up by enterprises at their Palaces of Culture. What is the difference between the club and election campaign centre? Most important of all, the Palaces or Clubs have much greater potential. They have large auditoriums, libraries, amateur dramatic and dance groups. Nearly every event arranged by them for the voters finishes with a concert or feature film—something an election campaign centre can hardly offer.

The Clubs concentrate on informing the voters about the activities of the CPSU—the spearhead of the Soviet working people in their struggle to build communism and the guiding spirit of all organisations of the working people, both public and government, which takes part in elections to the Soviets in a firm alliance with the non-Party people.

It has become a tradition for the Communist Party to address the voters before elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the highest organ of state power in the Soviet Union, telling them about the home and foreign policy it is pursuing and about what will be done to develop the economy further, increase the people's living standard, extend socialist democracy and build up the Soviets and other mass organisations through which the working people are drawn into the management of society and the state.

The Poll

I have taken part in several elections, and must say that each of them has indelibly impressed itself upon my mind. There is an unforgettable atmosphere of elation; election day is a really great holiday in the Soviet Union.

Early in the morning, at 6 a.m. local time, the doors of polling stations throughout the country are flung open. Chairmen of divisional election committees announce the start of the poll and invite the citizens to begin casting their votes. The dozens of voters who have been awaiting this moment are "waylaid", in turn, by radio, newspaper, television and film newsreel reporters who all want to interview the firstcomers, to learn with what thoughts and feelings they are entering the polling station.

On the eve of the poll the divisional election committee receives from the local Soviet Executive Committee a verified list of voters and makes certain that it has sufficient ballot papers and voting record forms. Committee members divide out the duties deciding who will hand out the ballot papers, mark the register and be in attendance at the ballot boxes. They also decide on how they will arrange the handing out of the ballot papers and keep the record of the out-voters that may turn up, and position the ballot boxes.

Just before opening the polling station, the chairman of the divisional election committee shows the ballot boxes to those present to prove that the boxes are empty. He then locks them up and seals them with his seal.

Most voters usually turn up at the polls between 8 a.m. and noon, especially in summertime in towns when everyone wants to get out into the country as early as possible.

Voters learn of the whereabouts of their polling stations from the announcements made in the local press, over the radio and from the notices and posters put up by the divisional election committee 15 to 20 days before the poll. Furthermore, every voter is sent an official poll card stating the date and hours of the poll and the address of his polling station.

On entering the polling station, the voter is directed to a member of the committee who looks at the voter's passport, or trade union card, collective farmer's book or some other identification. Then he checks to see if the person is on the register and hands him the ballot papers, putting a mark opposite the appropriate name on the register to show that the man has received his papers. The voter then goes into a vacant booth where he marks the ballot papers and then puts them into a ballot box.

In every polling station separate rooms are set aside or special booths are equipped for the marking of the ballot papers. Such rooms and booths may be occupied by only one person at a time, the presence of a second person, not excluding members of the election committee, is strictly prohibited. After receiving his ballot papers, the voter goes into the room or booth to mark them. Should he consider a candidate not worthy of being a deputy, he may strike out his name. A small table and sharpened pencils are provided in every booth for the purpose.

A voter who is unable to mark the ballot pa-

pers himself on account of some physical defect may ask any other voter to step into the booth and assist him. In every case, however, the voter makes his own decision. To make one's own decision is both the duty and the right of every voter. Infirm and elderly voters, if they so wish, are brought to the polling station and taken home after they have voted in cars placed at the disposal of the divisional election committee for the purpose. Those who cannot come to the polling station because of illness are visited at their request by members of the committee who come round to their homes with small ballot boxes. The boxes are sealed and may be opened only at the end of the poll.

Voters who have to spend the day of the poll on a train may cast their ballots in a specially equipped compartment in one or in every carriage. After all who have their voting certificates with them have cast their ballots, the divisional election committee declares that the poll is over, counts the votes cast and immediately this is done notifies the district election committee of the results.

On the instructions of the Executive Committees of territorial and regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies, polling stations, and, accordingly, divisional election committees, are set up at railway junctions and big stations for the service of the voters who are travelling on the day of the poll and have their voting certificates with them.

In the case of small separate groups of voters, such as winterers at polar stations, geological expeditions, shepherds tending their flocks far away from any polling station, and so on, the

divisional election committee may organise a poll for them at the places where they will be on the day of the election.

When elections to more Soviets than one are held on the same day, the voter may get from two to five ballot papers at once. To quote an example, at the 1971 elections every voter in the Kemerovo Region (RSFSR) was handed four ballots simultaneously: a white one for the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, a green one for the regional Soviet, a blue one for the district Soviet, and another white one for city or rural Soviet.

At 10 p.m. local time all polling stations are closed; the committees open the ballot boxes and begin to count the votes.

The Count

Under the Election Statute, the count may not begin earlier than 10 p.m. local time, whether or not all registered voters have voted. The count is carried out at the polling station and proceeds without interruption until all the votes cast have been counted up and the returns made out for every electoral district.

The chairman of the divisional election committee reads out the votes ballot by ballot in the presence of the committee.

If more than one candidate have been voted for or if the form used is not of the required type the ballot is considered invalid. If a ballot paper is marked for one of the registered candidates but shows, besides it, the name of person written in by the voter, the ballot is considered cast for the registered candidate, since, not having been nominated by any public body,

as is required by law, the person whose name has been written in cannot be a candidate.

The count is carried out publicly. Authorised representatives of public organisations and associations of working people and representatives of the press may be present at the count. This plus the democratic procedure of setting up election committees is reliable guarantee that the results of the poll are assessed in good faith.

After signing and announcing the election returns, the chairman of the divisional election committee puts a copy of the returns into an envelope which he seals and sends to the district election committee.

The results of the poll in the electoral district are assessed by the district election committee on the strength of the returns sent in by the divisional election committees. The candidate having polled an absolute majority of votes, i.e., more than 50 per cent of all the valid votes cast in the electoral district, is considered returned. The poll is considered valid if more than 50 per cent of the registered voters have taken part in it, and if the proceedings have been conducted in strict conformity with the Election Statute. Otherwise, the poll is declared invalid. In 1971 this only happened at six out of more than two million electoral districts. Another election was soon conducted in each of these six districts.

Such instances are evidence of the exacting requirements laid down by Soviet law for the election of deputies to the local Soviets and the highly responsible approach exercised by election committees with respect to electoral law.

At a special ceremonial meeting of the district

election committee, the candidate who is elected is handed a paper by the chairman stating that he has been elected deputy of the Soviet in question.

Where none of the candidates receives an absolute majority of votes, the district election committee puts up for a second election the two candidates who polled most votes. The poll takes place within two weeks of the first stage of the election. Should the candidate standing for the constituency poll less than 50 per cent of the votes cast, the district election committee appoints a second election within two weeks of the first.

In each case the electoral registers compiled for the first election are used again and the election is conducted in full conformity with the Election Statute.

At their first session, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Supreme Soviets of union and autonomous republics, and local Soviets hear the reports of Credentials Committees, and on the basis of these they decide whether to recognise the credentials of deputies or annul their election. They decide accordingly whether the respective election committees should be disbanded or not.

On June 18, 1973, the day after elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies, V. Beketov, a **Pravda** correspondent, wrote this about the poll as it was conducted in Moscow: "At 6 a.m. sharp, 3,149 polling stations opened in Moscow. In the course of the election campaign, Muskovites' homes were visited by 183,500 canvassers. The number of canvassers thus equalled the population of many a large regional

centre. More than 10,000 candidates stood for the local Soviets in the capital yesterday, 1,160 of them for the Moscow Soviet. There is the scale of genuine people's power for you!

"For whom, then, did the Muskovites cast their ballots? Nearly half of the candidates, or 47 per cent to be exact, were workers from every branch of the capital's economy. More than 45 per cent of the candidates were women. Young people under thirty, including fourteen undergraduates standing for the Moscow Soviet, accounted for 25 per cent of the candidates."

Further on, V. Beketov stated:

"There was a mass turn-out in all the thirty districts of the capital, and the voting was well organised. Much had been done to prepare for the event. People were reminded of the date, June 17, not merely from the posters calling on voters to cast their ballots for the candidates of the bloc of Communists and non-Party people; the day was also mentioned in the text of numerous socialist competition commitments undertaken by collectives and individual workers and in the reports submitted by production teams, shops and factories. So, forging press operator N. V. Metelkin from the 'Vladimir Ilyich' Works made a pledge to save seven tons of metal, producing seven thousand forged pieces accordingly, in honour of the elections. And he fulfilled this promise. 755 workers of leading trades at the same works had been vying to fulfil their individual half-yearly programmes by June 17, while the works as a whole was able to report on May 31 that it had fulfilled the targets for the first half of the 9th Five-Year Plan."

The report finished with these words:

"By 6 p.m., according to the city election committee presiding over the elections to the Moscow Soviet, 99.8 per cent of the capital's electorate had taken part in the ballot."

Elections in the Soviet Union are marked by the high degree of activity on the part of voters. The following table shows the number of voters who took part in the elections to the Supreme Soviet.

The Dates	Total Electorate	Voters Participating	% % of the Total Electorate
December 12, 1937	94,138,159	91,113,153	96.79
February 10, 1946	101,717,686	101,450,936	99.74
March 12, 1950	111,116,373	111,090,010	99.98
March 14, 1954	120,750,816	120,727,826	99.98
March 16, 1958	133,836,325	133,796,091	99.97
March 18, 1962	140,022,359	139,957,809	99.95
June 12, 1966	144,000,973	143,917,031	99.94
June 14, 1971	153,273,112	153,172,213	99.96

Elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies took place on June 17, 1973. Five days later, TASS published a report on the results of the poll in each of the 15 union republics. 99.96 per cent of the total electorate took part in the voting. Nearly all of them (more than 99 per cent) cast their ballots for the candidates of the bloc of Communists and non-Party people. TASS pointed out that in casting their votes for the best representatives of the working class, collective farm peasantry and intelligentsia Soviet citizens voted for peace and happiness in the world, for the further enhancement of the might of their Soviet socialist country and for its further prosperity.

Protected by the Law

The Soviet citizens' right to vote is defined and protected by Soviet legislation. The main guarantee is the democratic principles written into the Soviet Constitution—universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, accountability of deputies to their constituents, and the right to recall deputies.

In outlining the election procedure, the Election Statute shows concretely what rights the citizens enjoy in connection with their vote and provides additional guarantees, in accordance with the principles of the Soviet electoral system, that these rights be observed.

To protect the rights of Soviet citizens, the electoral law makes it incumbent upon Soviet Executive Committees to ensure all voters an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the electoral registers within a required term before the election. Should a voter find any fault in the register, he, as we mentioned earlier, may lodge a claim or objection with the Executive Committee, asking that the errors be corrected. All such claims must be considered within three days. Besides having the applicant included in the register, the Executive Committee must have the guilty party penalised.

Should the Executive Committee refuse to correct the register, the voter concerned may appeal to court.

To give every voter an opportunity to elect the Soviets, the Election Statute includes mea-

sures to enable citizens who, for various reasons, cannot take part in the poll at the place of their residence to exercise their right to vote. For this purpose special polling stations are set up in passenger trains and at railway stations and airports at which voters who are travelling may cast their ballots. To enable an out-voter (duly certified) to exercise his right of vote at any place convenient to him, the law stipulates that no polling station may be closed before 10 p.m., even if all the registered voters have already cast their ballots.

Thus Soviet electoral law, by determining the way in which electoral registers are to be compiled and published and by stipulating that any citizens whose rights have been infringed may seek legal protection, ensures that all voters are included in the electoral registers and that none of them is deprived of the opportunity to take part in the poll.

Soviet citizens' rights are guaranteed at all successive stages of the election, including the poll. Thus, voters may be present at the nomination of candidates by public organisations and associations of the working people. Every citizen present at the nomination meeting may, without fear of consequences, express his opinion of the candidate being nominated, raise objections or propose another candidate for the meeting's consideration.

Should a citizen be prevented by other persons from taking part in a nomination meeting for representatives to sit on the election committees or for candidates to the Soviets, this is considered to be a violation of the right to vote.

Every citizen has as much right to canvass for a candidate standing for a Soviet as the public organisation that has nominated him. This right is guaranteed by allowing private citizens to write in the press, speak over the radio and appear on television, and by setting aside special rooms for holding election meetings, discussions, meetings with the candidate, and so on.

The poll and the count constitute the most important stage of an election. To enable all voters to come to the polls, elections are appointed for a non-working day. The election proclamation is issued and published in the press at least six weeks before an election.

Soviet electoral law guarantees free choice to every voter taking part in elections. That is why no canvassing is allowed in the polling station during the poll. Voters may mark their ballot papers in specially equipped rooms or booths. Violation of the secrecy of voting is a punishable offence.

Suffrage in the Soviet Union is stringently protected by the law, which regards violation of the citizens' right to elect and be elected to all Soviets of Working People's Deputies and Supreme Soviets, as well as to People's Courts, as a criminal offence.

Article 132 of the Penal Code of the RSFSR states that anyone who prevents a citizen of the USSR from exercising suffrage by violence, lies, threats or bribery shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of up to two years or by corrective labour for a term of up to a year's duration. This refers equally to private persons and to officials.

The criminal acts punishable under Article 132 of the Penal Code of the RSFSR include violation of a citizen's right to be included in the electoral register, to see the register, to receive a voting certificate if this is required, to take part in meetings held to set up election committees or nominate candidates, to canvass for a candidate, to be notified of the date and place of the poll, to enter the polling station to cast his vote, and so on.

Anyone who prevents or tries to prevent a citizen by violence, intimidation, false representation or bribery from exercising franchise incurs criminal liability from the moment he commits the act, regardless of whether or not he succeeds in preventing the citizen from voting.

The Penal Code also establishes liability for forging election documents, falsifying returns and violating the secrecy of the ballot. Article 133 of the Penal Code of the RSFSR states that persons guilty of such criminal acts shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years or by corrective labour of up to one year.

A deliberately wrong count can be made either in a polling station or when the final returns are drawn up in a district election committee. The Soviet press some time ago reported an incident which occurred at the RSFSR local Soviet elections in March 1969. During the count, the chairman of a divisional election committee in an administrative district in the Kurgan Region, Citizen E., crossed out on several ballot papers the name of a candidate for the village Soviet with whom he had a quarrel.

For his crime, Citizen E. was sentenced by the court to one year corrective labour.

Crimes associated with the violation of the voting right are however committed very seldom.

All elections conducted in the Soviet Union in the past have demonstrated that the election procedure established by law actually provides for democratic elections to the Soviets and enables Soviet citizens to elect the most deserving people, who enjoy high prestige and unqualified support of the people. This was convincingly proved, for example, by the elections to the local Soviets of Working People's Deputies in June 1973, in which nearly 100 per cent of the registered voters or nearly all the Soviet citizens eligible to vote took part. The press commented on the fact that the elections to the local Soviets were conducted in an organised manner, and that the voters displayed great civic activity, eagerly voting for the nominees of the bloc of Communists and non-Party people. In voting for them the constituents, as they said at the time in the press, over the radio and on the television, were fully confident that their deputies would show themselves worthy of the people's trust and would actively work to translate into practice the great plans for building communism, drafted by the CPSU.

The election campaigns are graphic manifestations of the great advantages afforded by socialist democracy, which makes it possible, as Lenin pointed out, to draw the mass of the people into the management of the state.

The Power of the Soviets Is the Power of the People

Socialism has created a new type of democracy, the most broad and representative, the most fair to the working people. Soviet government has promulgated in word and made possible in fact the complete equality of citizens before the state, irrespective of social status, education or religion, in every sphere of economic, political and social life; the equality of men and women, and of people of all races and nationalities. All this is vividly illustrated by the Soviet electoral system which legally confirms the right of citizens to create the Soviets, the political basis of the USSR. All Soviet citizens take part in electing the Soviets; they send their best representatives to whom they can entrust the managing of the state.

The Soviet electoral system is a sum total of the principles defining the election procedure and providing for the Soviet citizens' participation in electing representatives to the organs of power. The system as a whole is designed to enable the people not only to elect these organs of power but also to supervise their functioning and take an active part in the work. And this is natural, for we see the essence of socialist democracy as being citizens' active participation in managing the state and solving all social and government problems. Power in the Soviet Union is vested in the people and in the people alone. They themselves conduct elections; they elect deputies to all organs of

power, who, being working people themselves, have close links with the working masses.

Soviet deputies are not parliamentarians in the bourgeois understanding of the term, but public leaders taking part in legislation and law enforcement, people who do not separate themselves from the working collectives to which they belong. A Soviet deputy continues to work where he worked before being elected; he lives in the midst of the masses and knows what cares and needs they have. This makes the deputy a genuine exponent of the people's will and hopes and a champion of their interests.

The Soviet electoral system provides for the broadest possible participation of the people in shaping the organs of power. In accordance with the Constitution of the USSR, all elections of deputies are conducted on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. Practically all adult citizens may elect to all Soviets. A citizen may be elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR upon reaching the age of 23, to the Supreme Soviet of a union or autonomous republic upon reaching the age of 21, and to local Soviets upon reaching the age of 18. The Soviet Union fixes the lowest age of candidature in order that youth, the most active section of society, may be drawn into political activities.

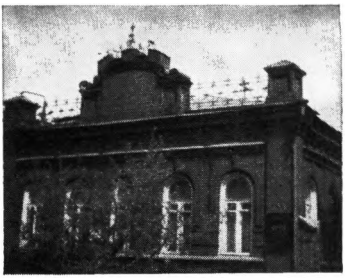
The democratic principles of the Soviet electoral system find consistent expression also in the fact that men and women have equal rights, that any citizen may elect and be elected, irrespective of race or nationality, religion,

education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities.

Universal suffrage has long become one of the most distinctive features of socialist democracy—democracy for the masses. Soviet electoral law guarantees the people both the right to form the organs of power and to exercise daily supervision over the manner in which these organs, the political basis of people's power, are carrying out their will. The Soviets exercise both legislative and executive power. Therefore political and economic leadership are combined in the people's hands.

The Communist Party, the leading force in Soviet society, is pursuing a course for the further extension of socialist democracy, for drawing more and more working people into the management of public affairs. The Report of the Central Committee of the Party to the 24th CPSU Congress, held in the spring of 1971, pointed out that the main direction of the wide-ranging efforts of the CPSU in building up the Soviet state and improving the political organisation of society further was and continues to be—in accordance with the tasks implied in the building of communism—the further development of socialist democracy. Soviet electoral law and the Soviet electoral system are, now as before, major instruments whereby the people's unlimited participation in the Soviets, the organs of people's power, is assured.

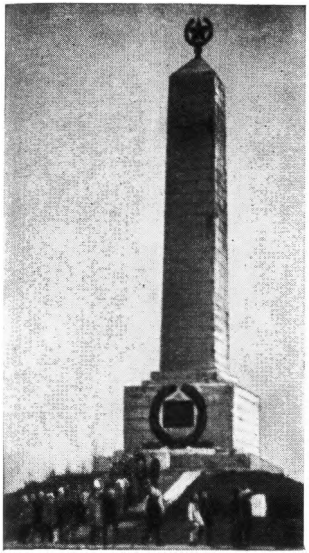
Election day in the USSR
is a nation-wide holiday.



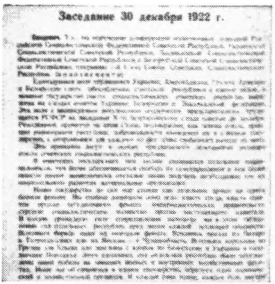
The Museum of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the first Soviet formed in Russia.

"The first meeting of the Soviet," a painting by M. Troitsky.

Deputies representing three different generations meet in session.



The obelisk on the bank of the river Talka in Ivanovo.

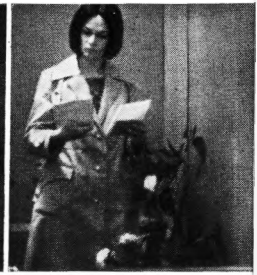
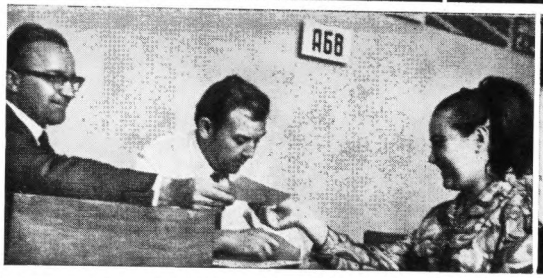


Заседание 30 декабря 1922 г.

Part of the stenographic record of the First Congress of Soviets of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mikhail Smirnov, a participant in the First Congress of Soviets of the USSR, among trade-union activists.

At the entrance to the polling station.

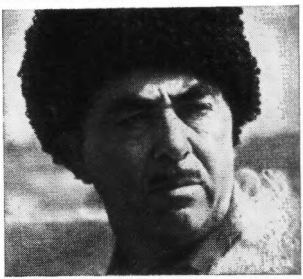



A high percentage of the electorate—about 99.8 per cent—vote in elections in the USSR. First photo on top: Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, at the polling station.

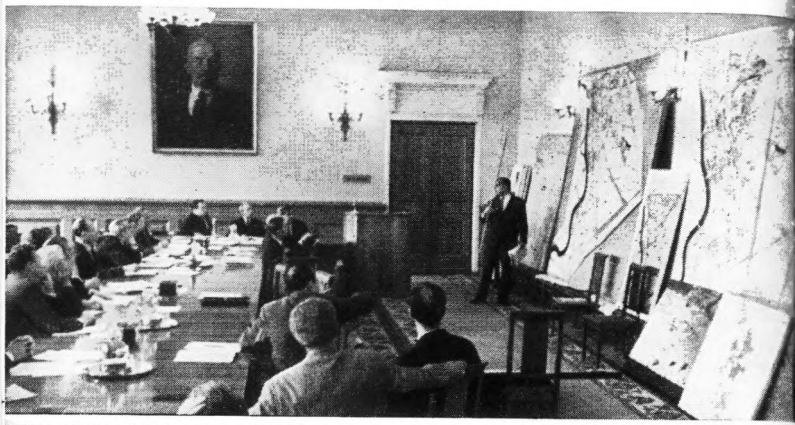
Representatives of all sections of society take an active part in the election campaign.

A ballot paper for elections to the Moscow Soviet.

The actress Angelina Stepanova is handed the Credential of the Deputy of the Moscow Soviet.



People of various nationalities and occupations are represented in Soviets.



Every aspect of the life of the people, of the country's development, is the concern of a deputy.

A standing committee of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in session.

A joint session of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet in the Moscow Kremlin.